

**Margit Koller: Expansion in Sculpture – Site-specific Installation,
Environment and the Non-autonomous Artwork**

Report about my research program in New York, supported by the Peter and Irene Ludwig
Foundation, 2018 September

Expansion in Sculpture – Site-specific Installation, Environment and the Non-autonomous Artwork

Virginia Dwan and the Dwan Gallery.

Dia Art Foundation.

MoMA PS1.

Dan Flavin Institute and The Donald Judd Foundation.

Do Ho Suh: Rubbing/Loving Project.

House as Art - Arthouse

1. Introduction

I spent one month in New York in September 2018, thanks to the researcher scholarship of Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation. In my workplan my focus was tended onto monumental sculpture, site-specific installation and environmental art, as well as the public sculpture, with the connection between the financial possibilities and artistic freedom. In addition, I always examine the spatial art in the relation of the artwork with its surrounding space and the perceptual skills and possibilities of the viewer. During my stay in New York I was visiting museums, collections, galleries and public parks inside the city and around and in Washington DC, which support site-specific and monumental spatial art in temporary exhibitions or permanent collections (open for the public). I visited loads of colossal and inspiring places, but because of the limit of the report I only write about my most important experiences which are directly connect to both of my research and creative process. (My experiences about the public sculpture could fill another 10-page long report¹).

As I'm writing my report three weeks after my arriving, the language may mirror my relation to my fresh discoveries, experiences and spontaneous recognitions. Surely, I need time to settle them down to work my newly started research out. Therefore, I'm going to write about those phenomena experienced in New York which are affect my doctoral research program and my creative process the most.

At first, I'm writing about some model institutions which are supporting and financing progressive and monumental artworks from the '60-s in that scale which are unknown in Hungary, but rare in Europe too. Then I'll continue with projects which cast light both on my artworks and theoretical research which have been unclear to me and give a highly useful knowledge for my future dissertation.

Before I'd explicate the topic, I'd mention that I met more times Anikó Erdősi, art historian, with whom I talked a lot about the specificity and the differences between the artworld in New York and Budapest, focused on the field of installation art and environmental art. She moved to New York from Budapest a long time ago and wrote more publications about Land Art, Earth Art and Public Art². She drew my attention to the person of Virginia Dwan and recommended to me loads of places to visit, which I wouldn't realize without her. This professional relation with her helped me a lot to visit New York City – which provide endless possibilities, sites and programs – in a more conscious way.

Through the oeuvre of Virginia Dwan and the institute of Dia Art Foundation we could gain a view to theoretical and practical methods which provide notably free space for the artistic thinking and practice.

¹ Socrates Sculpture Garden, National 9/11 Memorial, Washington DC memorials, Storm King Art Center, Highline Park, etc.

² For example: 'Anikó Erdősi: *Breaking Through the Canon, Breaking Through the Gallery Wall*', <http://www.sculpturenature.com/en/exhibit-dwan-gallery-lacma-2017/> 2018.10.24.

After noting the Dan Flavin Institute (which also the part of the Dia Collection), the Donald Judd Foundation and the MoMA PS1, which are very significant examples of the monumental spatial site-specific art, a new topic integrated into my recent studies: 'Artist House – House as Art'. This topic will constitute the main part of my future dissertation. Therefore I'll explain my newest recognitions in this topic through these examples, and I also discuss about the connecting artwork of Do Ho Suh: the Rubbing/Loving Project.

2. Virginia Dwan and the Dwan Gallery

Virginia Dwan is the heiress to the Minnesota-based conglomerate 3M. She was leading her self-founded gallery, the Dwan Gallery between 1959-71 at first in Los Angeles then in New York. From the beginning of the '60s she opened to new genres in the first line, as pop art, earth art, land art, minimal art and concept art. Cooperating with the art dealer John Weber³, she supported and financed emerging young artists, who have become significant figures of the canon since then, as Michael Heizer⁴, Walter de Maria⁵, Robert Smithson⁶, Edward Kienholz, Arman, Yves Klein, Franz Kline, Sol LeWitt, Andy Warhol, Richard Long, Jeff Koons, Joseph Beuys, Hans Haacke – just mentioned the most connected names to my topic. She's organized important exhibitions which have had significant affect to the art of the '60-70s, as the exhibition 10⁷ in 1956. About Earth Art she declares in the video signed below:

„I think it's essential to experience the work as a kinetic phenomena. Part of it was the experience of the body moving through that space. The gallery itself in a sense was up there, the exhibition was taking place there“.

We can say that after the art and statements of Marcel Duchamp the Earth Art and Land Art are the first trends which questioned the exclusive power of the white-cube as the only site where art can happen And it also points out the radical innovative way of thinking which Virginia Dwan supported by her gallery and money.



¹ Michael Heizer: *Double Negative* (1969), source of the image:
<http://www.ampersandla.com/soil-of-creation-michael-heizers-double-negative>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/01/arts/design/01weber.html> 24.10.2018.

⁴ She financed *Double Negative* (1969) and *City* (1972-) earthwork pieces.

⁵ She financed the first version of the *Lightening Field* (1974)

⁶ She financed the *Spiral Jetty* (1970)

⁷ <https://www.nga.gov/press/exh/4004.html> 24.10.2018.

Later she's donated the biggest part of her collection to big American museums⁹.

In 2016-17 the National Gallery of Art (Washington DC) organized an exhibition, titled „*Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959–1971*” to represent the Dwan Gallery and Virginia Dwan. From the concept of the exhibition and the video¹⁰ on the webpage¹¹ the wide horizon can be seen clearly which was opened by Virginia Dwan as a patron to progressive and emerging artists, secondly the not negligible recognition of the 20th century is traceable that the history of art is outlined not by the lonely geniuses, but the genial art communities, where the open minded, generous patron has very important function. The practice of being patron determined by the currently applicable tax system in the USA, which connects the encouragement and the development of art closely (these connections would require longer text, so I won't detail it here, but in my dissertation).

„I wanted works to sell because I wanted people to take them home and enjoy them and really live with them and the impact of that would have on the collectors. But ultimately, I was going ahead what I want to do, and the artists want to do. (...) I think that what a great artist does is very significant, and I want to see them have a place on Earth to recognition and being care for and supported. That really is meaning front to me. They were every one of them really great, significant artists and people made me feel at one in the world, made me feel that they were looking for things the same way I was.”

3. Dia Art Foundation

As the institution's statement says, the „*Dia was founded in New York City in 1974 by Philippa de Menil, Heiner Friedrich, and Helen Winkler to help artists achieve visionary projects that might not otherwise be realized because of scale or scope. To suggest the institution's role in enabling such ambitions, they selected the name "Dia," taken from the Greek word meaning "through."*

Today, Dia is a constellation of sites, from the iconic permanent, site-specific artworks and installations in New York, the American West and Germany; to an exhibition program that has commissioned dozens of breakthrough projects; to the vast galleries of Dia:Beacon; and finally the programs of education and public engagement.”¹²

The Dia Art Foundation includes institutions like Dia:Beacon (New York state, Beacon city, North from New York), Dia:Chelsea (a gallery in Chelsea district), The Dan Flavin Institute (New York state, Bridgehampton city), Walter de Maria, The New York Earth Room (as a permanent exhibition room), etc., over and above outside of cities in the nature can be found Walter de Maria, The Lightning Field (Western New Mexico), Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty (Great Salt Lake, Utah), Nancy Holt, Sun Tunnels (Great Basin Desert, Utah). We can say that this institution has supported great scale projects (or their continuation) which push the boundaries of art. Philippe Vergne, the foundation present director explains: “*I don't want Dia to become a time capsule*”. This statement suggests that the expansion of the institution's collection hasn't finished yet, more project will be sponsored in the future. Therefore, their most important aim is closely connected to the concept which is represented by Virginia Dwan too, that is they ensure financial

⁹ For example: Whitney Museum, MoMA, National Gallery of Art (Washington DC), etc.

¹⁰ [Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery](#), Video, Released: January 10, 2017, (23:37 minutes), 2018.10.24.

¹¹ National Gallery of Art, <https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2016/from-los-angeles-to-new-york-dwan-gallery.html>

¹² <https://www.diaart.org/about/about-dia> 24.10.2018.

support for monumental artworks and projects while they give total freedom to the artist. As Philippe Vergne says: „to make the artist’s dream possible”.

From the listed institutions above I’ve visited the Dia:Chelsea, the New York Earth Room and the Dia:Beacon – unfortunately I couldn’t visit the Dan Flavin Institute because of technical difficulties.



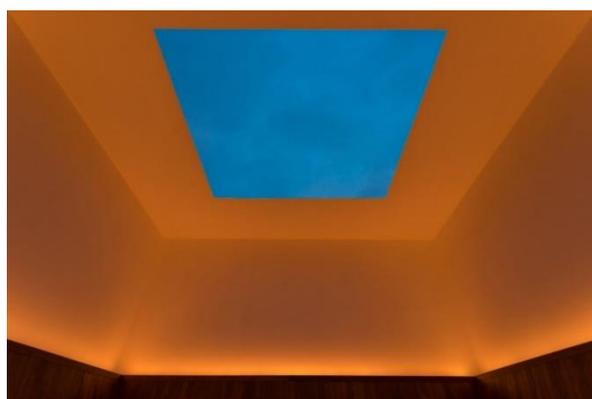
2 Richard Serra: *Torqued Ellipses* (1996-97), source of the image: <https://www.diaart.org/collection/artist-a-z/serra-richard>

The Dia:Beacon collection is next to the Hudson river in Beacon city, and gives permanent place to land art, minimal art and conceptual art. The most exciting experience for me were the works of Richard Serra and Mary Corse. Walking in Richard Serra’s *Torqued Ellipses* was amazing: the installation affects the viewer’s perception of space and the sense of balance, the body becomes uncertain in the smart related given space. It proves the very high knowledge of sculpture and highlights the importance of the body perception of space and the artistic possibilities of its shaping in a very sophisticated way. Mary Corse was a new discovery for me: her abstract, minimalist pictures with special coating materials operate the perception of light especially the presence of the light in the given space –

in a site-specific way. I saw works from her which were playing with the dramaturgy of the perception and receiving in two rooms in the Dia:Beacon collection, and parallel of this show she was represented in a temporary exhibition in the Whitney Museum¹³.

4. MoMA PS1

The MoMA PS1 is one of the oldest and largest non-profit contemporary art institutions in the USA which plays catalyst role in the realization of experimental, big-scale, site-specific ideas of emerging artists. The institution which rather defines itself as an exhibition space than a collecting institution¹⁴ was founded by Alanna Heiss in 1971 as ‘*Institution for Art and Urban Resources Inc.*’. They’ve organized exhibitions related to underutilized and abandoned places in New York. The first exhibition opened in 1976 titled ‘*Rooms*’: artists were invited to transform the spaces, which had been originally a school building, into site-specific artworks. With this, the tradition of inviting artists, like James Turrell, William Kentridge, Pipilotti Rist, to create space specific artworks has been started.



3-4 James Turrell: *Meeting*, MoMA PS1, source of the images: <https://www.moma.org/> and own photo

¹³ Mary Corse: *The Survey in Light*, <https://whitney.org/Exhibitions/MaryCorse> 24.10.2018.

¹⁴ <https://momaps1.org/about/> 24.10.2018.

I visited the institution by a guided tour: a young curator was leading us through the building while talking about the history of the building as a school and how it's transformed to an art institution and also presented the projects of the artists. From the often-hidden minimalist artworks through the frescos to the whole room scale installations it was very exciting how the artists reflected to the given space. In one of the rooms there is James Turrell's light installation called Meeting. This is the first light installation of him in the USA and it defined his later works. Apparently the most preferential time to visit this installation is at sunset (this time shows the changing of outside lights the most, therefore it's the best time to get a picture about Turrell's philosophy of perception and sensing time), but the tickets run out months before, so I saw it at daytime, but it was still expressive.

5. The Dan Flavin Institute and the Donald Judd Foundation

The Dan Flavin Institute and the Donald Judd Foundation had straight effect to my artistic practice, it was really liberating and it opened new horizons for me in the rethinking of my possibilities.



The Dan Flavin Institute is also the part of the Dia Art Foundation in Bridgehampton, New York State. A firehouse was transformed in 1983 to represent 9 light installations of Dan Flavin, which were created between 1963-81. *'By manipulating the formal, phenomenal, and referential characteristics of light, the installation asks viewers to consider a series of contrasts -- between colors, intensities of light, structure and formlessness, the obvious and the mysterious, and the serious and the humorous.'*¹⁵ Therefore the house as a complex artwork invites the viewer to rethink his perceptual skills. Walking in its spaces the viewer goes through a re-personified space and re-modified senses in a site-specific way.

⁵ Dan Flavin Institute, source of the image: <https://www.diaart.org/>

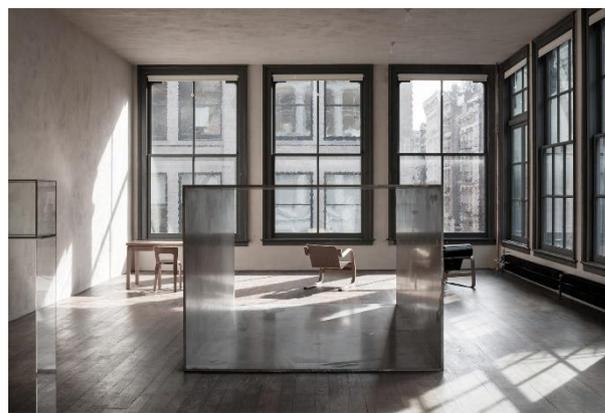
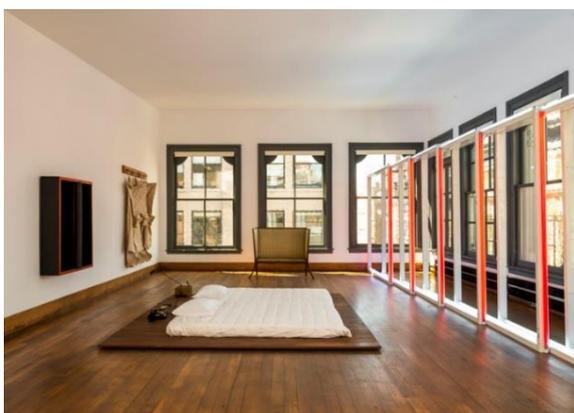
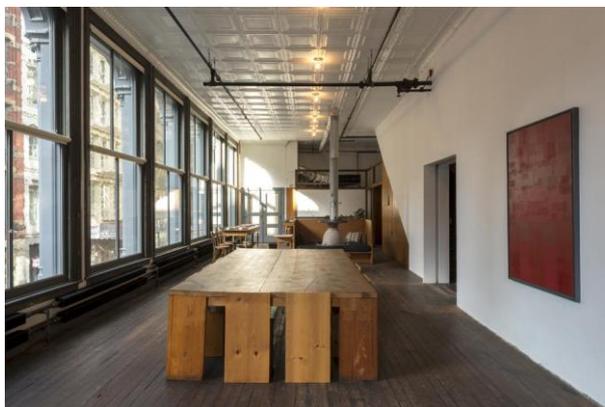
The Donald Judd Foundation includes two buildings: one in Marfa (Texas) and the other in 101 Spring Street, New York. Donald Judd was living in these places for longer period in a way he transformed these houses into a complex, minimalist artwork. I could visit the house in the 101 Spring Street in a guided tour.

This block used to be a factory before, as Judd wrote in the article '101 Spring Street'¹⁶. He had bought the block in a factory area of Soho before it became a fancy, expensive and touristic district by the gentrification processes. The 19th century building has 5 levels and outside the cast-iron structure it has huge window surfaces which now hide reconsidered, huge and completely open spaces by consequent artistic concept. On the ground floor the foundation organizes temporary exhibitions by the collection, while the levels above there is the unchanged living space of Donald Judd: kitchen with dining room, living room, bedroom, studio, kid's room, library and other community and family places under the glory of site-specificity and minimalism. Next to the self-designed furniture, surfaces and light installations there are the

¹⁵ <https://www.diaart.org/visit/visit/the-dan-flavin-art-institute-bridgehampton-united-states/> 24.10.2018.

¹⁶ http://judd.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/101_Spring_Street_1989.pdf 24.10.2018.

(often site-specific) artworks of his friends as frescos and others. Walking through the presence of the material manifestation of the intellectual atmosphere of Judd's age was touching.



6-9 101 Spring Street, The Donald Judd Foundation,

source of the images: <https://www.dezeen.com/2013/05/23/donald-judds-home-and-studio-restoration-by-architecture-research-office/>, <https://artistshomes.org/site/101-spring-street>, <https://www.klatmagazine.com/en/architecture-en/donald-judd-housestudio-necessary-174/50015>, <http://stuffnonsense.com/stuff-and-nonsense-judd-foundations-building-nyc/>

6. Do Ho Suh and the Rubbing/Loving Project

In Hungary, where the spatial art is still dominated by the traditional sculpture, the big scale installation art is a quite new phenomenon. The institutional system has started to react to it only in the last few decades (the market not so much). One of my aims in New York was to get a glance at how an artist can work and create in an actively functioning art system in that scale. How can they start their career and what kind of possibilities do they have in the art market in the middle of the artworld as an environmental or big scale installation artist.

I visited the retrospective exhibition of Bodys Isek Kingelez in the MoMA¹⁷, which was a pleasant example how could he create utopias about urban constructions with no money and no institution behind him, and how he was exhibited as an artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo now in the in MoMA, New York. But I must remind the scale of his works as miniatures and mock-ups of cities and its spatial problems. It's interesting to compare with the retrospective exhibition of the British artist, Rachel Whiteread¹⁸, which represented artworks from the big scale installations to monumental public sculptures in the relation of the individual and the built space (more importantly, during the lifetime of the artist)

¹⁷ <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3889> 24.10.2018.

¹⁸ <https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2018/rachel-whiteread.html> 08.11.2018.

New York is a multicultural melting pot, where the capital spent on the art opens possibilities for artists in that scale which are impossible to compare with the European possibilities and scale. I had the feeling that the American sculptors (and also the painters) transform their spatial experiences based on the endless nature and huge urban spaces into acceptable, human-scale installations; as the smaller Middle-European countries' artists try to push their boundaries and spaces of them, consequently they reach the field of the big scale installation art from the opposite. But without the supporting institutions and patrons (like the listed ones above) most of the ideas and concepts are able to reach only the level of the plans¹⁹. Simplified: the big scale environments claim big exhibition spaces with program based supporting system (like the examples above).

The last example connecting to the topic in my report is Do Ho Suh: the South-Korean fine artist (1962-) is living and working on the Seoul-London-New York axis, in New York he is the artist of the Lehmann Maupin Gallery. His main topic is the relation of the human to his surrounding space. He's exploring among others how this relation is changing when the individuum leaves the place where he's born, how are the meanings of the sites transforming, and how we carry these sites inside us between the process of migration and homogenization in the globalized world – are we able to be home in our world?



10-11 Do Ho Suh: *Passage/s* (Victoria Miro Gallery, 2017), own photos

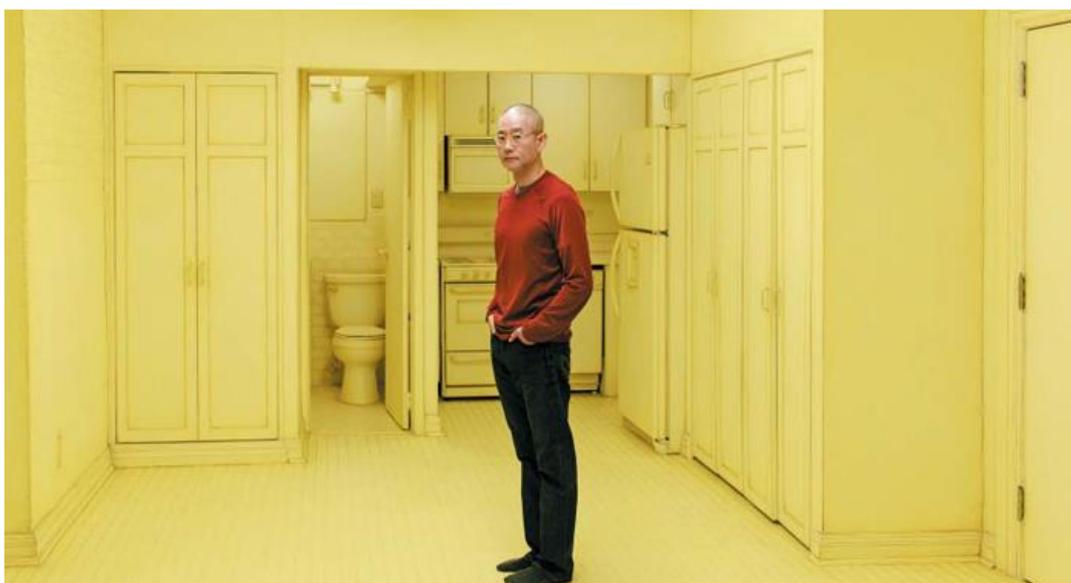
Now I met with his smaller graphics and objects and a bigger installation in the Lehmann Maupin Gallery, and I've already seen his exhibition in live in London in 2017 called *Passage/s*²⁰. For me the most exciting works of Do Ho Suh are the big scale fabric environments and the paper based, overmarked living spaces. With these artworks he copies his own personal sites into human scale installations, as an intimate invitation to the viewer to a thinking platform or *field*, where the subjectivity (emotions, remembrance) gets into contrast with the spectacular world surrounding us. The public can step into a life-size, colourful and woven fabrics-made *site* with own boundaries in the white-cube. He expands subjective, experience-based rooms and corridors which are the carriers of his personal stories, in the general exhibition space. The meticulous handmade fabric installation on metal base is the copy of his New York apartment.

¹⁹ Like the exhibition of Erik Mátrai (light artist): *Vision – Installations*
http://www.vizivosigaleria.hu/content/2017/matrai_meghivo_web.pdf 08.11.2018.

²⁰ *Passage/s*, Victoria Miro Gallery, 2017 <https://www.victoria-miro.com/exhibitions/501/> 08.11.2018.

His words about his installation: *"I see life as a passageway, with no fixed beginning or destination. We tend to focus on the destination all the time and forget about the in-between spaces."*

In his project called *Rubbing/Loving Project*²¹ he's focusing his New York apartment too – he was living in Chelsea for 18 years – but here he's made a straight copy of it with the technique of frottage by every square centimetre of the apartment. In the art21 interview²² he explains that for him *'the whole process is to remember the space, and also somehow memorialize the space'*. I can totally agree with the thoughts of him that living in our personal spaces in a more conscious way could lead us to a less manipulated and much more real presence, to a higher level of the *'dazein'*. As James Turrell says about his installation: *'This world that we have around us is not the world what we receive but more the world what we create and make'*²³



¹² Do Ho Suh: *Rubbing/Loving Project*, source of the image:
http://art.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2017/06/06/2017060600278.html

7. House as Art – Artist House

All of my new spatial and site-specific experiences in New York, which count on the human spatial sensibility and vigilance have clarified a topic for me, a field where I've been doing my research already but almost in dark in Hungary. In this last topic I'd summarize the background of my workplan which has prepared my New York research program, secondly some extra impressions which shed light on my dissertation and also enrich my creating process.

My doctoral research program's work title is *The non-autonomous artwork*. I tend focus on that kind of spatial genres and artworks both in my creating process and my theoretical research, which are as opposed to forcing and endlessly repeating the officially ready-made **answers** to the viewer (propaganda art, commemorative representation, illustrating beauty ideals, etc.), the site-specific installations and environmental art could activate the spectator via raising **questions**: for comprehension the viewer has to

²¹ The title is a game with the words of 'rubbing' and 'loving', because in the written Korean text it can be read in the same way. So it has a connotation to the slow, meditative process of copying the space as a symbolical method of love and care.

²² There is a fantastic video about the Rubbing/Loving Project: <https://www.designboom.com/art/do-ho-suh-video-full-scale-rubbing-new-york-home-art21-12-09-2016/> 08.11.2018.

²³ 'This world that we have around us is not the world what we receive but more the world what we create and make' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuJpDXkMz8&list=PLhuEyf1go4nUojrp-rYif3vDwCffFZVzZ> 08.11.2018.

look out of his habitual, ingrained system. The '*total installation*'²⁴ in its structured and manipulative spaces builds on the reaction of the body through its perceptual skills to the space around and force the mind into a self-reflective mode.

By the turn of this century the question of our perception – keeping it awake or even more revitalize it – has become more and more problematic due to the spreading of virtuality and globalization of the mass-media. The society of today recognize the 'monopoly of the spectacle'²⁵ with no doubt and without any questions. In the world where the spectacle the artworld (as a market) becomes the part of the system immediately: collection of negotiable specious products. I keep in priority genres which query the legacy of the western artworld and its official canon (there is no chance to be an outsider of the system when you are inside but only to break the walls brick by brick in a slow process). The 'non-autonomous artwork' as the opposite of the 'autonomous artwork' based in the modernity, depends on its actual space and time: this kind of site-specific installation and environmental art are often temporary or ephemeral and give chance to the artist to walk on a way where the border between reality and specious productions could decompose – for a while at least.

In my creative process I try to inhabit the given spaces: the nature, my living space or the exhibition space. I want to lead the public's gaze into their surrounding space and time which I rebuild around them in an exhibition situation. I work mostly with the motif of door and window: I project videos on them or build them, but I always mix the time and space in a way which suggest the viewer to rethink his basic sensory skills to get a weapon against the manipulation of the authority.

I've got great mental freshness and self-confidence from my New York journey for my upcoming projects. The possibilities of the inhabitable places have expanded in my mind and indicated my creating field/field of creation in the future. In my theoretical research program now I feel how to constrict the wide topic of spatial, monumental, site-specific installations and environments (the total installations) to the ***House as Art, Artist House***. In my view the surrounding space of the human is the symbolic but straight manifestation of the mental state of the individuum and also the society. The *house* can be found between the urban construction and sculpture, as an artwork integration of the personal space, like the projects signed in the footnote²⁶: symbolic documents of the given age and the society's mental state, transformed into artwork by artists, not far from the reality, but involving it with a strict fusion.

²⁴ Ilya Kabakov, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/from-totalitarianism-to-total-installation-8550568.html> 08.11.2018.

²⁵ Guy Debord: The Society of Spectacle, 1992

²⁶ Do Ho Suh: Rubbing/Loving Project and other works, works of Rachel Whiteread, Women House, Gregor Schneider: Totes Haus Ur, Kurt Schwitters, Donald Judd House, Dan Flavin Institute, works of Erzsébet Schaár, apartment of Basquiat, etc.



13 *Measuring my Memory*, 2018, own installation, own photo



14 *Nobody's Living Here Anymore II.*, 2017, own work in a cooperation